

5. Resurgent monasticism—Gibbs observes, “Today, contemplative orders provide a corrective to the hyper-activism and materialism of contemporary Western societies. They are oases of calm and repose that are proving immensely popular with people seeking to wind down and refocus, as they make time to recover from their adrenaline addiction” (137).
6. Expanding networks—Gibbs believes missional entrepreneurs are fueling a growing number of independent church planting initiatives. He lauds these new church networks because they are free to innovate and take risks, noting, “They are liberated from the institutional controls that can frustrate and shackle a new generation of leaders” (85).

Gibbs implies there is a growing desensitization toward the fads of modern ecclesiology: purpose-driven, emergent, missional, mosaic, etc. *ChurchMorph* is an excellent survey of how the fads intersect and where they came from. New generations traditionally shed the thinking of their forefathers in search of new ideas and a unique identity. The church will continue to morph with the culture around it. New trends are coming. And whatever they are, the next trend will attempt to correct all the others before it. This is the rhythm of the church in a morphing culture. This is the nature of a decaying world in constant motion, waiting for the return of the One who will make everything new again.

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Stetzer, Ed and Dodson, Mike. *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can, Too*. B&H Books, 2007. 224 pp. \$17.99.

Reviewed by Keith Stone. Keith is a professor of pastoral ministries at Shasta Bible College in Redding, California, where he also serves as Vice President of Student Life. He has also been a pastor for forty years and is presently pastoring Shasta Community Church near Redding.

Stetzer and Dodson have surveyed over three hundred comeback churches that made a significant transition. Their research is thorough, almost too detailed, and the footnotes testify to a discipline of study that guarantees accuracy. Throughout the book, Scripture underscores every step that put these comeback churches on the road to recovery.

The reliability of the research also echoes a ring of hope on nearly every page. Church transformation, the authors agree, is neither guaranteed nor ever easy. But this book underscores that such transformation can happen to any church that is declining or reached a plateau. The level of hope within the pages of this book

should encourage the pastor or church member in a struggling church to renew his strength like the eagle and begin again.

The purpose of the book is to encourage any dying church that it can make a transition. The emphasis on scriptural authority and the numerous practical solutions were strengths of this work. While the foundational concept of balancing Christology, Ecclesiology, and Missiology needs to be expanded, this book is a great resource for church leaders.

The writers begin by laying a foundation for comeback churches. The first conclusion drawn from the study of comeback churches “is that they first had a spiritual experience that redirected and reenergized their lives, beginning with their leader” (15). Carefully, the authors open the reader’s eyes to the possibilities and specific steps to begin the transition.

Leadership, which begins the process, is addressed throughout the work. Stetzer and Dodson note that “Leadership is the most important factor in making a comeback” (210). The authors describe the value of models, beginning with prayer, building passion, and allowing the ministry to be shared (42). Vision develops from this stage. They write, “Vision is not something that could be done. Vision is something that should be done. . . . Visions are God sized” (46, 48).

The next building block for comeback churches are the three faith factors: 1) “renewed belief in Jesus Christ and the mission of the church;” 2) “renewed attitude for servanthood;” and finally 3) “strategic prayer efforts” (56–68).

The authors’ emphasis on this latter building block is excellent. Throughout the book, the spiritual life of the pastor and the people is emphasized. The authors call the reader to “Pray regularly and passionately” (40). The authors note that prayer is the most important church growth principle and the power behind the principles (70).

Worship and preaching is addressed in chapter four, with the majority of the space directed toward the role of music and worship. I felt this chapter left one important question unanswered: Does the style of music need to change to bring the church back? Also, the preaching section is too brief and offers no suggestions for further study. The fifth chapter addresses evangelism. In this chapter, prayer and small group ministries are also addressed as related to evangelism.

The authors more thoroughly develop the issue of small groups in chapter eight. Sunday school is referenced as the best small group tool (147). Several practical matters that often seem very important are discussed in chapter nine. Facilities, marketing, books and resources, church age, and church size are all areas that demand some attention in this process of church growth. Other chapters are

devoted to addressing leadership issues, prayer, and potential challenges for comeback churches.

The authors call the reader to renew his or her belief in the foundational aspects of Christian theology. While growing deeply in love with Jesus, the brothers and sisters, and the lost in the community are areas of the Christian life that many take for granted, Stetzer and Dodson call the reader to focus on these areas.

I was very encouraged with the authors' emphasis on the Scriptures and the careful organization of the book. The surveys of the over three hundred churches gave authority to the conclusions. The numerous practical insights from individual churches studied provided some very helpful material.

Smith, Efrem and Phil Jackson. *The Hip Hop Church: Connecting With the Movement Shaping Our Culture*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005. 227 pp. \$15.00.

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Reviewed by Robert W. Strong. Robert is the Executive Director of Edification at Ecclesia Christian Fellowship in San Bernardino, California. He is presently working on a D. Min. at Talbot School of Theology.

Smith and Jackson have collaborated on this book with the purpose being to identify the mission opportunity for the church to reach a generation of youth who are less and less attracted to the church of their parents. The authors write with a sense of urgency and conviction, challenging the status quo, as they address the realities of reaching the younger generation.

In the first section of the book, "Church and Hip-Hop," Jackson develops four points of significance: 1) the influence of hip-hop is strong and rapidly increasing; 2) the church seems to be in denial of this fact; 3) parents do not know what to do about this influence; and 4) the youth who are being influenced do not recognize the strength of the influence they are under. It is necessary for the church to establish points of connection with youth, both in the church and outside of the church.

Such points of connection as peace, love, community, dance, rap, and art are shared interests between the church and the hip-hop culture. Jackson asks a pertinent question: "Can these connections lead us to the development of a theology or missiology of hip-hop culture?" (35). In order for effective ministry to take place, the church must engage in meaningful conversation with such youth to first understand and then address their issues from a biblically relevant perspective. The church must address the current reality from the perspective of the youth who are influenced by hip-hop culture, and not from her own perspective.